

### Epiphany 3B (1/22/12 – *Fishing for Men with Repentance and the Gospel*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Simon, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen of Galilee [MK 1.16, 19]. Not the way we normally think of fishermen. They had no fishing poles. They had no large trolling ships. They did it “the old-fashioned way.” They earned their living casting large nets by hand ... and repairing those nets themselves when they became torn on the lake bottom or by fins or from decay by water and the sun. These were the tools of their trade – fishing boat and oars, nets and muscles. It did not take formal education – simply learning the “tricks of the trade” from their fathers who were fishermen before them ... and applying themselves diligently to their vocation.

Jonah was a prophet – the son of Amittai ... of Gath-hepher in the land of Zebulun [2KGS 14.25]. We know little of his background – the trade of his father ... his education. We do not know what Jonah was doing the first time *the Word of the LORD came to* him to go to Nineveh [JON 1.1-2]. We only know that this second time *the Word of the LORD came to Jonah* [JON 3.1], he had just been spat out upon the dry land after spending three days in the belly of a great fish for trying to run away from God [JON 2.10].

What we do know is that Jonah was called by God to be prophet – and bring a message to the people of Nineveh. What we do know is that Simon, Andrew, James, and John were called by Christ to follow after Him. What we do know is that Jonah, Simon, Andrew, James, and John were called by God to *become fishers of men* [MK 1.17] – and that the message of both the Old Testament Prophet and the New Testament Apostles was essentially the same. They were both called to be *Fishing for Men with Repentance and the Gospel*.

God sent Jonah to the pagan city of Nineveh. It was in the center of the Assyrian empire. Soon enough, God would use Assyria to punish His rebellious and apostate Israel. And Jonah did not want to go. Jonah was over-patriotic. He did not want to call the unbelieving Ninevites to repentance. For, repentance leads to the knowledge of sin. And the knowledge of sin leads to recognizing the need for a Savior. And recognizing the need for a Savior means that one might turn to God in faith and receive mercy and forgiveness –

for such is God's character ... to be merciful and to forgive readily the sins of the penitent. Jonah did not want to call this enemy people to repentance so that they might turn and receive the Gospel of God's forgiveness and mercy in the promised Messiah.

Sadly, we are too often like Jonah – the Jonah of the first two chapters – either by intent or by default. And on a day like today – the thirty-ninth anniversary of that horrible decision to make abortion the “right” of Americans ... a “right” that has meant the slaughter of 54,000,000 innocent lives ... a slaughter already ten times greater than the Jewish Holocaust. On a day like today, one of the sins for which we must repent is our lack of speaking God's Word that would call to repentance those who willfully condone and participate in the mass murder of millions of innocent infants.

Another sin for which we must repent is our lack of zeal in declaring God's message of repentance and faith to all we encounter in our daily vocations. We fear to call to repentance our brothers and sisters caught in sin. We fail to share the certain hope that is in us to those who have never known the Gospel of Christ. We neglect the support of our congregation and church body in the task of proclaiming the message of salvation. We take for granted that Jesus has caused the Kingdom of God to come near to us in forgiving our sins by His perfect life and His death and resurrection on our behalf.

Consider how different the story about Nineveh would have been, had Jonah refused the Lord's command to preach repentance and faith to them the second time. Consider how different Galilee and Jerusalem – and the entire New Testament – would have been, had Simon, Andrew, James, and John refused to leave their nets to follow Jesus at His command.

Christ's call to follow after Him in repentance and faith is not always easy. It is a call to leave behind our sinful lives. It is a call to set aside – at least for a time – our daily vocations ... so that we may sit at the feet of our Lord to learn **from** Him and learn **of** Him and His divine Gospel-work for our salvation. But we find it so difficult at times to set aside even 5 minutes in the day to read His Holy Word ... or an hour or two on Sunday to receive the Gifts of His Gospel in Word and Sacrament. And even in our daily vocations, we are not as

diligent as Jonah (after his repentance) or John (before his imprisonment and death) or the Apostles. *The present form of this world is passing away* [1COR 7.31] – yet we cling to it with every blink of the eye. On the other hand, we let our eyes fall closed in sleep when the eternal treasures are set before us.

*Repent and believe in the Gospel!* [MK 1.15]

That is the message of the Old Testament. That is what Jonah preached. That is the message of John – even when he is in prison. That is the message of Jesus – to whom all the Law and the Prophets pointed. Turn from sin in contrition ... and turn to God in the full assurance that for the sake of His promised Messiah your sin has been atoned for ... your iniquity has been pardoned ... and your death has been turned to life.

There is continuity to God ... and His self-revelation in Holy Scripture. There are not two dispensations – a way He saved the Old Testament believers and a different, grace-oriented way He saves us New Testament believers. God does not change. He *is the same yesterday and today and forever* [HEB 13.8].

Nor are there different ways that He calls to repentance and faith. It is by the Word – proclaimed by His Prophets ... Apostles ... Pastors. To be more precise, it is by the Word proclaimed **by His Son through** those He has called to follow Him. As the author of HEBREWS says: *In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets; but now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son* [HEB 1.1-2].

And this is *The Epiphany of Our Lord* in today's text. Here is the manifestation of the Deity in the Man Jesus of Nazareth. The eternal God has become flesh and works ... even today ... through the lowly means of the proclaimed Word. He Who is Almighty – and commanded all things into being by His Word – allows His Word to be ignored by one such as Jonah and all who go their own way. Yet in His divine mercy, God keeps on calling us to repentance and faith in His Gospel. Out of love He punishes our sin and casts us, as it were, into deep darkness – so that we might, like Jonah, come to our senses ... repent ... and believe once again in Him Who is mighty to save.

For if He is able to save Jonah from the belly of a great fish – after tossing

him into the tempestuous sea – will He not also save us from all calamity ... so that we are “spat out” upon that distant heavenly shore? After all, our Lord Christ redeemed Jonah’s sinful rebellion – and was Himself three nights in the belly of the earth. But like a greater Jonah, Christ our Lord burst forth from His tomb the Third Day – alive ... forever.

Through His Word proclaimed by the reluctant Prophet, the Lord brought the unbelievers of Nineveh to repentance and faith so that He might show them mercy and forgive their transgression. Will He not – all the more – have His Word preached into **our** ears and souls so that **we** turn from our sin back to Him Who has made Himself **our** Lord, **our** God, and **our** Savior?

This is most certainly true!

At first, it might seem odd that our Lord would call simple, uneducated fishermen to be His first disciples – and later His Apostles. But that is God’s way. *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”* [1COR 1.26-31]

So it is that through His called servants, Christ the eternal God is **Himself Fishing for Men** ... and Women and Children ... **with** the humble means of the proclamation of **Repentance and the Gospel**. *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel!* In the fullness of time, the Son of God drew near by taking on Flesh from the Virgin Mary, so that He might fulfill all righteousness **for us**. In the fullness of this time, the Son of God draws near in His ever-present Flesh, so that He might apply His righteousness **to us**. In Christ our Lord, the Kingdom of God is at hand – and in Christ our Lord, **you** are brought into the Kingdom.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]